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THE MILITANT

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 81/NO. 14 APRIL 10, 2017

INSIDE
Youth, workers from 23 countries join May Day brigade to Cuba
— PAGE 9

US gov't escalates threats on N. Korea

BY SETH GALINSKY

Washington has escalated its threats against North Korea at the same time as U.S. forces are engaged in provocative Operation Foal Eagle military exercises in the area with thousands of South Korean troops. These moves pose the danger of military clashes on the Korean Peninsula and in the region.

"Let me be very clear: the policy of strategic patience has ended," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told reporters March 17 on a visit to Seoul, a not-so-veiled threat of U.S. military action. "All options are on the table."

Washington demands the Democratic People's Republic of Korea get rid of its nuclear weapons and cease all efforts to build intercontinental missiles that could threaten the U.S.

Tillerson cynically added, "North Korea has nothing to fear from the United States." But the U.S. has some 28,000 troops stationed permanently

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SWP: Help us win 'Militant' readers, raise contributions!

BY MARY MARTIN

Socialist Workers Party members and supporters are launching a seven-week campaign to take the party to workers on their doorsteps, at strikes and other labor fights, and to protest actions demanding amnesty for undocumented workers, against cop brutality, in defense of women's right to choose abortion and other issues of concern for working people.

A key part of this effort will be to expand the readership of the *Militant*, winning 1,100 new subscribers, coupled with getting out the same number of three Pathfinder books. At the same time, the party is organizing a Militant Fighting Fund to raise $112,000 to support the paper. The campaigns will run from April 1 to May 23.

The three books that are part of the drive are: *Are They Rich Because They're Smart?*; *The Clintons' Anti-Working-Class Record: Why Wash-*

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Socialist Workers Party: 'Universal health care!'

Sunnyside Seventh-day Adventist Church

Hundreds attend free health clinic, above, in Portland, Oregon, August 2016. Both Obamacare and Trump plan enrich insurance companies while health care for working people deteriorates.

Medicaid support, Republican splits sink 'Trumpcare' plan

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Amid seemingly unbreachable divisions from both the conservative and moderate wings within the Republican Party majority in the House of Representatives, President Donald Trump's plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare, was pulled from consideration right before the scheduled vote March 24.

The Trump administration's bill, like Obamacare, is not based on providing health care for all who need it, but pressuring more people to purchase health insurance, with rising

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Join fight for government funded health care for all!

The following statement by Osborne Hart, Socialist Workers Party candidate for New York mayor was released March 29.

Millions throughout the United States — unemployed or working,

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STATEMENT

U.S.-born and immigrants — are feeling the carnage of the slow-burning capitalist economic crisis.

Millions who want to work can't

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NY meeting: 'End US embargo of Cuba! Get out of Guantánamo!'

Militant/Paul Mailhot

"Solidarity with Cuba is very important at this moment," Sandra Ramírez, above, from Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, told over 200 people at March 25 Harlem rally.

BY SARA LOBMAN

NEW YORK — "Solidarity with Cuba is very important at this moment," said Sandra Ramírez, director of the North American division of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP).

"Cuba and the United States have established diplomatic relations," she said. "But the U.S. government still maintains a blockade against our country, still illegally occupies Guantánamo, and still has policies aimed at 'regime change' in Cuba.

"We will never renounce the construction of a socialist Cuba," Ramírez concluded to applause.

The ICAP leader was speaking to more than 200 people from New York and across the U.S. and Canada at a public meeting at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz center in Harlem. The March 25 event was part of a two-

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US wars in Syria, Iraq take deadly toll on working people

BY JIM BRADLEY

Washington's airpower, artillery and troops, working with the Syrian Democratic Forces, made up of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and their Syrian Arab allies, are closing in on Raqqa, which has served as the capital for the reactionary Islamic State since 2013. YPG leaders say this coalition of forces will lay siege to the city in early April.

At the same time, U.S. military forces alongside Iraqi army troops have pushed deeply into Mosul, the last major city occupied by IS in Iraq.

Washington is promoting these offensives to increase its military and political weight in the region against the competing capitalist powers of Moscow, Tehran, Damascus and Ankara. Their war moves have had a deadly toll on the civilian population, with hundreds killed and many more injured over the past weeks.

Over 150 men, women and children were burned to death in Mosul when several buildings in the Jadida district collapsed after being hit by U.S. airstrikes March 17. At least 33

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Inside

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–On the picket line, p. 5–

Idaho miners strike against union busting, for safety

Steelworkers at Quebec refinery strike over pension cuts

Ky. workers defeat state attack on desegregation

BY ARLENE RUBINSTEIN AND GALE SHANGOLD

Over four decades after civil rights battles in the streets won court-ordered busing to desegregate schools to combat grossly inferior education for Blacks, working people in Louisville, Kentucky, forced the defeat of moves in the state legislature to end the county's busing program.

Facing broad opposition to the assault in Louisville, proponents of "neighborhood schools" — code words for segregation — failed to meet the deadline to bring their bill up for a vote in the state senate. Similar bills failed in 2011 and 2012.

The fight for desegregation in Louisville has gone on since the 1970s, when supporters of Black rights seeking to dismantle Jim Crow segregation won a court order for busing. A similar battle was fought out in the "Battle of Boston," where defiance of court-ordered busing organized out of City Hall was met with mass, national street mobilizations. Volunteers rode the buses to defend Black children from attack.

This year's debate in Louisville was marked by support for 42 years of school desegregation and how the fight for it helped change social relations in the area, advance the rights of Blacks and transform the working class, making it stronger. The Jefferson County Teachers Association prominently featured on their website a statement opposing the bill and defending desegregation by NAACP President Raoul Cunningham.

"We cannot go back to prior to 1975," Amy Shir told the bill's sponsor, State Representative Kevin Bratcher, at a meeting Feb. 26 in Fern Creek, Jefferson County, whose participants were majority Caucasian. "It is unacceptable for Black students living in segregated neighborhoods. They will not have access to the equal opportunities that families where I live … have."

After the bill failed, Sen. Dan Seum pledged he would push another neighborhood schools law next year. He'll face the opposition of the majority of working people in Jefferson County. In 2012 half the candidates running for the county school board ran on a platform of getting rid of busing. All of them lost.

"I was for busing in the '70s and I still am," Karl Wisman, a retired pipefitter from Louisville, told the *Militant* in a March 14 phone interview. "Busing had a positive effect on Kentucky, helping to change attitudes and relations among whites and Blacks. In the workplace and the unions, it was the fight for affirmative action."

"When I first started on the job in 1979, there were few Blacks, and a lot of racism evident," he added.

Before busing, Louisville schools were more than 90 percent Black, and schools in the county approximately 95 percent Caucasian. Until the 1960s, Blacks attended one public high school, Central High, and one private school, Catholic Colored High.

The racist uproar against "forced busing" began at once when a schools desegregation plan was implemented in 1975. Racist opponents of busing enjoyed the backing of the school board. A section of Louisville's organized labor movement joined the fight against the order. The governor — himself an opponent of desegregation — felt compelled to order the National Guard out when schools opened.

Countermobilization for busing

Working people fought back. The Socialist Workers Party organized a branch in Louisville in 1976 out of these battles. Party members were part of the leadership of countermobilizations against racist attacks on busing, standing side by side with many other working people, including against the Ku Klux Klan. Socialist workers joined the debate on the job and urged their unions to take a stand and participate in the fight. The party's candidates used their campaigns to explain that busing was a victory for the working class.

The desegregation forces won out.

As part of the rulers' backlash against affirmative action across the country, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in 2007 that Louisville's efforts to desegregate the schools violated the Constitution because it used race as a factor. In response the school district came up with a plan that used income rather than race as a standard to maintain a countywide busing program. "This community really values an integrated school system," Superintendent Sheldon Berman told the *Louisville Courier-Journal.*

"Louisville is one the few cities nationally that has not retreated, where peoples' experiences lead them to desire diversity because it benefits the entire community," Cunningham told the *Militant* March 19. "This fight will come back at us, so we're starting now to prepare for the next round."

Arlene Rubinstein and Gale Shangold were members of the Socialist Workers Party branch in Louisville in the 1980s.

Pa. protest: 'I won't let you disappear my neighbors!'

Militant/Ruth Robinett

READING, Pa. — Carrying signs saying "I will not let you disappear my neighbors," "No 287g," and "If you come for immigrants I will stand in your way!" some 250 supporters of immigrant rights demonstrated here March 18, at the Berks County Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Eric Weaknecht says he wants to assign his force to collaborate with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to help catch and detain undocumented workers. ICE's 287(g) program authorizes extending the agency's powers to local cops. This would be the first time the program would be implemented in Pennsylvania.

The protest was sponsored by Make the Road Pennsylvania. "What the sheriff is proposing could terrorize thousands and thousands of residents of Berks County," Adanjesus Marin, Make the Road's director, told protesters.

— JANET POST

THE MILITANT

Anti-Trump hysteria is danger for working class

The 'Militant' explains the capitalist rulers' fear of the working class is behind the hysteria against the Trump administration. It infects liberals and the left, fueling attacks on meetings at Middlebury, Berkeley and elsewhere that shut down political space just when we need it most.

Liberal *New Republic* magazine argues workers' stupidity, bigotry created Trump.

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Help win readers, funds!

Continued from front page

ington Fears Working People; and *Is Socialist Revolution in the US Possible?* — all available at reduced prices.

Join SWP members and readers of the *Militant* worldwide to help make the spring drive a success. Our aim is to meet and involve workers who are looking for a political perspective and way forward in the economic and social carnage caused by the crisis of capitalism. The SWP and the Communist Leagues in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are the only parties to explain that to defend our interests the working class must build a movement capable of taking power out of the hands of the capitalist rulers.

SWP branches are planning to kick off the spring campaign in a big way.

In Los Angeles, Oakland and Seattle the branches are planning to visit United Steelworkers members on strike at the Lucky Friday silver mine in Idaho. Reports from these trips in the *Militant* are a tool for all workers to use to get out the word about these miners' stand against union busting and for safety at the Hecla mine.

SWP members will also go door to door in the Idaho panhandle to discuss the strike and the road forward for working people with workers there.

The United Farmworkers Foundation has called protest marches around the West Coast and in Texas. SWP members in Washington and California will join these actions, discussing the government's attacks on immigrant workers and the need to expand the fight for amnesty — a life and death question for the trade union movement.

Dan Fein from Chicago reports that SWP members there are organizing a campaign target week starting April 2 to put themselves in a strong position to reach out to the working class with the *Militant* and the party's program. Over the course of the drive they are planning regional teams to the coalfields in southern Illinois and to Milwaukee where 20,000 workers marched on the "Day Without Immigrants" in February.

They are looking to get back to Milwaukee on May 1, when local immigrants' rights groups are planning another large protest. Party members are building and organizing to join similar May Day actions being called across the country (see list on page 8).

Chris Hoeppner from Philadelphia said party members are organizing to respond to a new anti-Semitic attack on a synagogue there. They plan a solidarity visit to the synagogue and will go door to door in the area this weekend with the *Militant*.

"Charles Murray, the author of *The Bell Curve* will be speaking at Villanova University March 30," Hoeppner said. "We'll be there to debate and discuss the importance of political space for the working class with those protesting his talk. We will also show people Pathfinder's *Are They Rich Because They're Smart?* which explains what his *Bell Curve* is all about — a warning to the ruling class about the threat of the working class."

Three other books are also on special — *"It's the Poor Who Face the Savagery of the US 'Justice' System": The Cuban Five Talk About Their Lives Within the US Working Class*; *Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power*; and *Cuba and Angola: The War for Freedom*.

Militant/Edwin Fruit

Mary Martin, Socialist Workers Party candidate for Seattle mayor, speaks with Ian Wolford and Becky Altman in Mullan, Idaho, March 25 about silver miners strike against Hecla there.

As we take the party and its propaganda out broadly, we will also ask workers we meet to contribute to the Militant Fighting Fund. This annual fund is decisive for meeting the regular operating budget of the paper, to pay for special reporting trips when working-class fights break out around the world and to subsidize cheaper and free subscriptions to workers behind bars.

Join this campaign! Contact the office of the communist movement nearest you, listed on page 10, to volunteer or to order books and papers to distribute in your area.

All out April 1!

NZ Communist League campaigns to build party

BY JANET ROTH

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — "They say there are lots of jobs, but I know of many people who have been looking for work for a long time," Helena Tatafu told Patrick Brown, Communist League candidate for the Mt. Albert parliamentary seat, Feb. 24.

Tatafu exchanged views with Brown and this reporter as we knocked on doors in her neighborhood to spread the word about the working-class campaign the day before the election. The vote was sparked by the resignation of Labour Party Member of Parliament David Shearer.

"That's the reality for many workers, in spite of government claims of growth in the economy and employment," said Brown. "Workers know from our own experiences that many of our jobs are casual, part-time or temporary — and low-paid."

Tatafu said one of her relatives has been working through a casual labor hire agency for years, while trying to get a permanent job. Companies don't care about providing jobs, she said. "They just care about money, about profits."

"The Communist League demands a government-funded program of public works to put tens of thousands to work at union-level wages," Brown said, "building or repairing social resources like schools, hospitals and public transport."

During the monthlong campaign, the escalating cost of housing — rented or owned — was a frequent discussion on doorsteps. A recent international survey ranked Auckland the fourth least affordable city in the world to buy a house. "To end skyrocketing rents and house prices, we say housing must cease being a commodity for profit," Brown said in his candidate's statement in the *New Zealand Herald*.

Many workers wanted to discuss the significance of the election of U.S. President Donald Trump — especially his administration's moves targeting immigrants.

Brown showed them the *Militant* newspaper, which campaigns for amnesty for undocumented workers in the U.S. and urges workers to join protests against the raids and deportations. Many were surprised to hear that Trump's actions were built on the policies of previous administrations, including those of his Democratic Party predecessor Barack Obama.

Growing government moves against immigrants are the reality in New Zealand as well. Communist League campaigners joined 400 protesters Feb. 7 against Wellington's anti-immigrant policies as well as Washington's raids. On Feb. 11 Brown joined an action to defend Indian students fighting deportation.

Earlier that day he took part in a march of 200 people to oppose new laws that make it harder for working people to get released on bail and the government's ongoing construction of new prisons. The protest was sparked by news that the prison population had gone over 10,000 in November.

"The rulers use their prisons to intimidate workers," Brown told those he talked to. "They fear the working class and seek to keep us from coming together to fight against the bosses' attacks on our jobs, wages and living conditions."

The 10,000 figure doesn't include thousands more who are in the clutches of the so-called justice system — on parole, awaiting sentence, or under supervision after getting out.

Labour Party candidate Jacinda Ardern won the Feb. 25 election.

"We found workers were looking for the discussions we began on their doorsteps and we made new contacts for ongoing political work," Brown told those at a wrap-up social on election night. "The Communist League looks forward to putting forward a working-class, revolutionary alternative in the general elections in September.

"The theme then will be the same as in Mt. Albert," he said. "Build a revolutionary workers party, build the Communist League, support us, join us."

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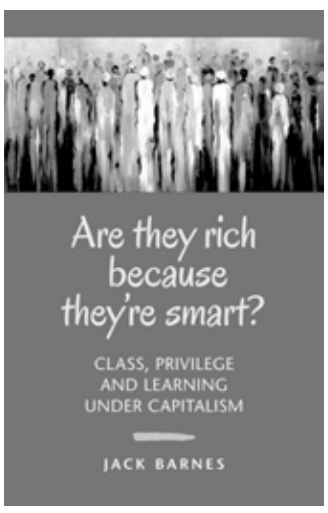

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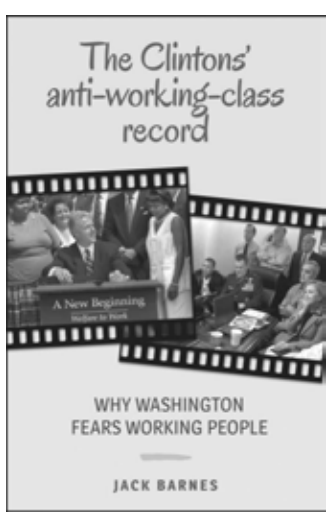
JACK BARNES



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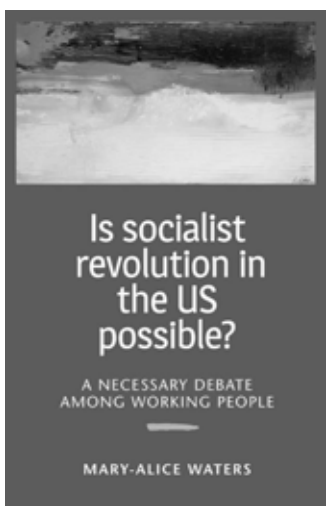

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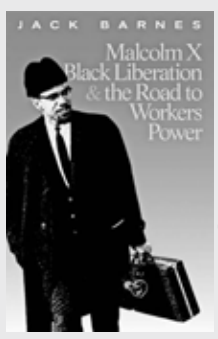

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JACK BARNES
$15

$7 each without subscription (Trial subscription $5 for 12 weeks)

‘Militant’ fights prison censorship in Illinois

BY JOHN HAWKINS

CHICAGO — The fight against censorship of the *Militant* at the Illinois River Correctional Center in Canton is winning support after prison authorities denied a long-term subscriber three issues of the socialist newsweekly last fall.

Officials at the 2,000-inmate prison wrote the *Militant* last December that they would review the censorship.

They claimed the three issues — each of which contains articles reporting on the *Militant*’s fight against censorship at the Attica Correctional Facility in New York — are “detrimental to security, good order, rehabilitation, or discipline or it might facilitate criminal activity or be detrimental to mental health.”

Since David Goldstein, the *Militant*’s attorney, filed a Feb. 16 letter urging an end to the censorship, nothing further has been heard from Illinois prison authorities. Goldstein is with the prominent New York civil liberties firm Rabinowitz, Boudin, Standard, Krinsky & Lieberman.

“The Campaign to End the Death Penalty, CEDP, is an organization that has been in operation for 17 years and has provided services to over 5,000 inmates incarcerated within the Illinois Department of Corrections,” wrote Mark Clements in a statement supporting the *Militant*’s efforts to get the ban overturned. Clements spent more than two decades in prison in Illinois based on a false confession elicited through torture by Chicago cops.

“Based in Chicago, we published a quarterly newsletter, *The Abolitionist*, which carried stories like those in *The Militant*,” Clements wrote. “We believe that your facility’s Publication Officer acted out of bias when he refused to allow three issues of *The Militant* into the facility.”

“At no point in the history of the Illinois Department of Corrections that I can recall,” he said, “has violence nor rude behavior by inmates been the result of a publication.”

Prisons in Illinois — from Chicago to those run by the statewide Department of Corrections — are well known for their inhumane treatment of workers behind bars.

After the brutal repression of the Attica rebellion by prison guards, state troopers, local cops and the National Guard in 1971, prison authorities across the country began forming special tactical squads to be ready for use against protests, and to conduct mass “cell extractions,” searches and other special operations.

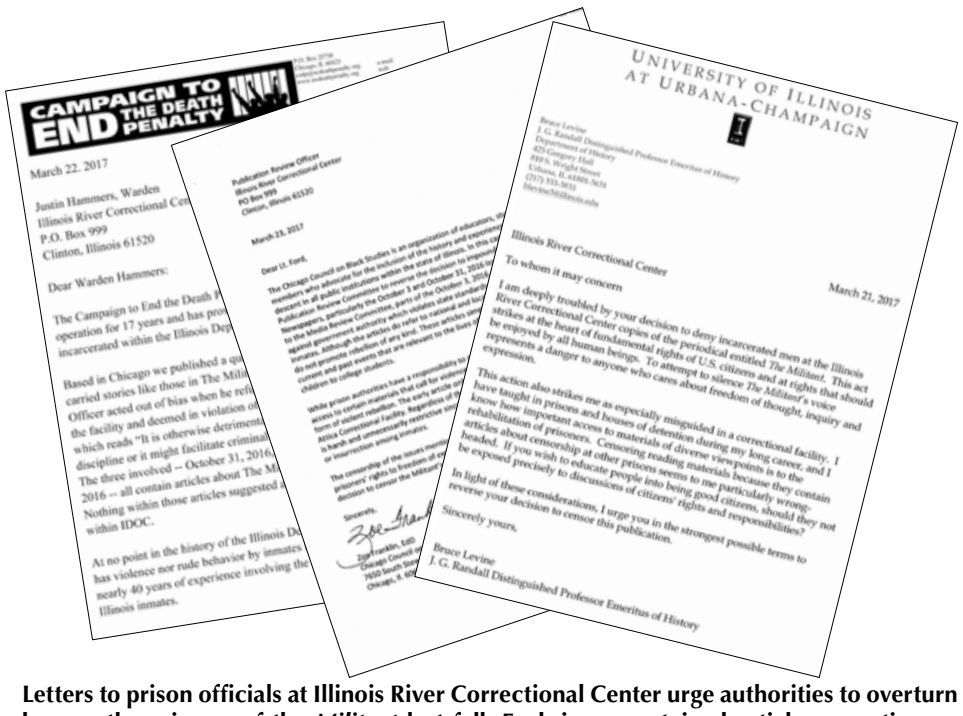
In 2015 a prisoner filed a lawsuit in federal court against the Department of Corrections and prison officials at the Illinois River Correctional Center, charging a special “Orange Crush” tactical squad conducted a brutal mass shakedown there. They berated hundreds of inmates, strip searched them, forced them to march in a degrading formation unit members called “nuts-to-butts” to the gym and held them shackled in torturous positions for hours while guards searched their cells, taking personal items, including legal papers.

The lawsuit charges similar attacks were carried out at three other Illinois prisons — Menard, Big Muddy and Lawrence.

“I am deeply troubled by your decision to deny incarcerated men at the Illinois River Correctional Center copies of the periodical entitled *The Militant*,” wrote Bruce Levine, J.G. Randall Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “This act strikes at the heart of fundamental rights of U.S. citizens and at rights that should be enjoyed by all human beings.

“To attempt to silence *The Militant*’s voice represents a danger to anyone who cares about freedom of thought, inquiry and expression,” he said.

“I have taught in prisons and houses of detention during my long career, and I know how important access to materials of diverse viewpoints is to the rehabilitation of prisoners,” Levine wrote. “Censoring reading materials because they contain articles about censorship at other prisons seems to me particularly wrong-headed.”



Letters to prison officials at Illinois River Correctional Center urge authorities to overturn ban on three issues of the *Militant* last fall. Each issue contained articles reporting on the paper’s fight against censorship at the Attica Correctional Facility in New York state.

“Although the articles do refer to national and local issues of concern to prisons, they do not promote rebellion of any kind,” Zoe Franklin, a professor at Olive-Harvey College in Chicago, wrote on behalf of the Chicago Council on Black Studies. “These articles simply share a unique world view on current and past events that are relevant to the lives of its newspaper’s vast readership.”

Censorship of “the *Militant* articles is a violation of prisoners’ rights to freedom of expression,” Franklin said, and “should be reversed.”

The *Militant* is still involved in a fight with New York state prison authorities over censorship of the original articles reporting on the anniversary of the Attica rebellion.

To send a statement of support or make a financial contribution to the Militant’s fight against censorship, contact themilitant@mac.com or write the paper at 306 W. 37th Street, 13th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Medicaid support, Republican splits sink Trumpcare

Continued from front page

premiums and deductibles for plans that offer less and less coverage. All these moves aim to maximize the superprofits of insurance, hospital and pharmaceutical companies.

The setback for Trump and the Republicans reflects the broader problems the propertied ruling families have today — especially the crisis wracking both of their political parties, the Democrats and Republicans. The Democrats are in shambles while the GOP thought they had papered over their differences by Trump winning the White House. The failure of the health insurance bill showed the crisis they continue to face.

One of the central issues Trump campaigned on was the inadequacies of Obamacare. But his proposed bill offered no alternative for working people to the unpopular one in effect now.

Instead of requiring individuals without health coverage to pay an annual “tax” of more than $2,000 per year per family — one of the most hated aspects of Obamacare. Trump’s plan extends tax credits to people who buy insurance.

Anyone who lets their insurance lapse for more than a couple of months would have to pay a 30 percent surcharge to the insurance company, on top of their premiums, to get a plan.

The overall impact of the Trump administration’s proposal would have been to increase the number of people without health care by 24 million people, the Congressional Budget Office said.

If left in place, “health insurance rates under the Obama administration’s *un*-Affordable Care Act will rocket between 30 and 60 percent in many states in 2017, and some 1.5 million working people will lose the plans they’re currently covered by,” Steve Clark writes in his introduction in Pathfinder’s *The Clintons’ Anti-Working-Class Record: Why Washington Fears Working People* by Socialist Workers Party National Secretary Jack Barnes.

The capitalist rulers aim to pit younger against older workers for what they claim is a “shrinking pie” for health care costs. Obamacare was designed to force young people, who use less health care, to buy it to create a bigger “pool” for the insurance bosses. The Trump plan aimed to make older people pay more, because they’ll likely use more.

After Trump pulled the bill, he said Obamacare would become a bigger disaster and everyone will demand change. One thing is for certain; working people will have to pay more for less.

These rising costs leave many workers with the cheapest, most shoddy plans, forced to pay thousands of dollars in annual deductibles before any insurance kicks in. And under Obamacare 28 million people remain without any coverage.

At the NorthCrest Medical Center in Springfield, Tennessee, for instance, nearly 90 percent of people with private insurance end up paying 100 percent of medical costs, Randy Davis, the hospital’s president, told the *Financial Times*. “They don’t hit their deductible when receiving an MRI, a CT scan, when they’re here for a $500 colonoscopy,” he said.

Attack on Medicaid entitlement

Trump’s health care proposals included steep cuts to Medicaid, enacted as an entitlement program in 1965, a result of the massive Black-led proletarian struggle that eliminated Jim Crow segregation. It provides medical care for workers with the lowest incomes and the disabled. It currently covers more than 70 million people.

During the election campaign Trump promised not to cut Medicaid, but his administration’s final proposal involves the biggest structural alterations to the program since it was created. Block grants would replace federal matching funds. States for the first time could impose work requirements, drug tests, or place a cap on the number of years a person could be covered by Medicaid.

Some of these proposed attacks were the result of demands made on Trump by members of the House Freedom Caucus, a group of some 35 conservative House members, many elected pledged to the Tea Party.

More importantly, a number of Republicans felt pressured to oppose the attacks on Medicaid in the bill, at a time when the carnage being visited on working people by the crisis of capitalism is deepening. Medicaid covers health care for one in five people in the U.S., including four of 10 children, nearly half of all births, and the cost of care for two-thirds of people in nursing homes.

Medicaid is widespread and popular. Two-thirds of everyone in the country — over 215 million people — either are covered by the program or have family or friends who are.

“I was not willing to gamble with the care of my constituents,” Rep. Frank LoBiondo, a Republican from New Jersey said, reflecting fear of the political price he would pay if he voted for the bill.

Many Republicans opposed the bill because they said its cuts would deepen the opioid epidemic ravaging their districts.

Workers are facing rising “deaths of despair” from deteriorating health care compounded by the unavailability of full-time work, a report issued March 23, by two Princeton University economists says. The study describes rising mortality of Caucasian men and women ages 45 through 54, from suicides, drug overdoses and alcohol-related deaths. In 2015 overuse of opioids killed more than 30,000 people in the U.S.

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

ILLINOIS

Chicago

No Worker Has to Die! The Working-Class Fight for Safety on the Job. Speaker: Laura Anderson, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., April 7, 7:30 p.m. Donation: $5. *2018 S. Ashland Ave. Tel: (312) 455-0111.*

—ON THE PICKET LINE—

Steelworkers at Quebec refinery strike over pension cuts

SALABERRY-DE-VALLEYFIELD, Quebec — Workers on strike against CEZinc refinery here are fighting company demands for steep cuts in their pensions. The 371 members of United Steelworkers Local 6486 walked out Feb. 12 and have kept up picket lines around the clock ever since. The company is co-owned by the Noranda Income Fund and Glencore, a multinational company based in Switzerland.

"The company is reaping a lot of profits," striker Michel Hudon told the *Militant* on the picket line March 13. Workers on the line explained that the company got a court injunction limiting picket lines to seven strikers at each gate. Strikers showed *Militant* reporters how they actively keep the plant under surveillance to make sure CEZinc doesn't violate Quebec's anti-scab law, which prohibits companies from hiring replacement workers during strikes.

"We are getting a lot of support from other USW locals and our strike fund will last for the duration," said Hudon. "Workers from Lafarge Cement who won their strike to defend their pensions have come to show their solidarity with us."

Alain Croteau, Quebec director of the Steelworkers, told a meeting of 300 strikers March 8 that they would receive regular contributions from the 600 USW locals in Quebec. "When there's a conflict involving a USW local it's all Steelworkers who are involved," he told the meeting. No new negotiations are scheduled between the union and CEZinc.

— Beverly Bernardo

Illinois meatpackers strike for seniority and overtime pay

SAUGET, Ill. — Overtime pay for Saturday work and respect for seniority rights are two key demands by more than 200 meatpackers who went on strike March 18 at the Holten Meat plant in this suburb of St. Louis. Members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 655 voted 124 to 38 to reject the company's contract offer and set up picket lines. The plant produces frozen hamburger patties and other meat products.

"We used to work Monday through Friday, but two years ago, the company started splitting our days off," Otis Lumpkin, who works in the grinding department, told the *Militant* March 25. "We had a contract. It's like they threw it away."

Collins Reischman

United Food and Commercial Workers members on strike against Holten Meat plant in Sauget, Illinois, rally March 27 against company attacks on seniority rights, overtime pay, health care.

The bosses call their scheduling "quality of life," forcing workers to take a weekday off and work Saturday without overtime pay during the busy season, workers said. "Yeah, ruin my life so they can improve the quality of theirs," said Kathy Binder, who works in packaging.

In addition, strikers said night-shift workers who want to bid on a day-shift opening could hardly ever get it. The company's proposed wage increases would be more than offset by increases in health care costs.

"I've never been in a union before, but I can see why it's important now," said Terrell Askew, a young production worker who was hired a year ago. "I support the union all the way."

Strikers also described how they couldn't get time off when they're sick or injured. Marta Elena Flores, a quality assurance inspector, said she broke her arm when she fell at work last October. "They took me to the hospital, and I had to have surgery," she said. "I got an attendance point for leaving work!

"Now if I work for more than five hours, my arm hurts a lot," she said. "The doctor the company sent me to says I don't need any restrictions."

Binder showed the scars on both hands and on her left wrist from repetitive motion injury surgeries. Strikers said such injuries are common in the plant, where bosses have sped up the line. Not having two days off in a row each week aggravates these injuries, they said, because workers don't have enough time to rest.

The bosses are busing in workers from a temp agency. The company didn't respond to a request for comment.

— Ilona Gersh and Naomi Craine

Idaho miners strike against union busting, for safety

BY EDWIN FRUIT

MULLAN, Idaho — As the strike against the Hecla-owned Lucky Friday silver mine here enters its third week, United Steelworkers Local 5114 members are piling up wood for the picket line burn barrels, preparing for the long haul. The mine bosses refuse to negotiate.

"What they really want is to bust the union, to get things back to where they were in the 1930s," Ron Pearce, who has worked at the mine for 38 years, told Mary Martin, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Seattle March 26 on the picket line. "We have already sacrificed and given a whole lot and now they want new sacrifices. But we have built up a strong union here."

The union contract expired in May last year and the company offered a "last and final" concession-filled offer. Hecla bosses told the union it would impose these changes on the workers March 13. The workers then went on strike that day.

The changes demanded by the company include dangerous loss of workers' right to choose their jobs and crews; loss of production bonuses key to their yearly income; recall rights from layoffs and mine closures slashed from three years to three months; and the right of the company to raise premiums and deductibles for health insurance at any time.

The company's decision to take over crew assignments is a major reason for the strike. "We work in very dangerous conditions, where everybody's got to watch each other's back," Phil Epler, the local union president, told the *Spokesman-Review*.

Company spokesperson Luke Russell told the paper the change is needed in order to "lower production costs."

The miners work more than a mile underground where the deep shafts are prone to rock bursts, which can cause the walls and roof to collapse.

Two miners, Larry Marek and Brandon Gray, were killed in separate mine accidents in 2011. Federal officials held the company responsible for both deaths. A month after Gray was killed, another rock burst injured seven more miners. The Mine Safety and Health Administration ordered the mine closed for a year for a long list of repairs.

"Our main thing is safety," Epler said. "We've had enough bad things happening at the Lucky Friday."

"There was no question we had to go on strike," said Joe Ploharz, 28, in the union hall. "We're exposed to rock dust, road dirt and bio diesel fuel."

"The bio diesel fuel peels paint off the underground equipment," another miner said. "Makes you wonder what it's doing to us."

"Some of the older miners were worried about us younger miners going into the strike. But we're all here," said Chris Lockard, 24. "To beat this as a small community we have to become as one. A handful of us picketing is not enough.

"We need to show the company that it's not just affecting 250 miners but its affecting thousands — our family members and others in the area," he said. "I will stand on the picket line as long as needed."

Solidarity from the community and other unions is strong. Money has come from USW Local 338 at Kaiser Aluminum in Spokane and USW Local 175 at Port Townsend Paper, which donated $5,000. Miners said both the Teamster truck drivers who haul rock waste from the plant and the union UPS drivers are refusing to cross the picket lines.

"We had a strike last year that brought our people together and we are still strong," said Jerry Womble, member of Machinists Local 86 at Triumph Composite Systems in Spokane. "Once we found out these miners were on strike we knew we would help. This comes from our own experience of getting support. We found that the first couple of weeks on strike and off work is fun and

Continued on page 7

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO

THE Mmilitant

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

April 10, 1992

Tens of thousands of supporters of abortion rights will be marching April 5. This demonstration will be an important countermobilization to the unrelenting attacks by the government against a woman's right to choose.

From the moment the ink was dry on the [Roe v. Wade] Supreme Court ruling, a woman's right to choose has been under attack. The government's hostility to the right to abortion has encouraged right-wing forces like Operation Rescue to blockade clinics. We need more and bigger actions at abortion clinics that are under threat, to counter the right–wing campaign.

Restricting abortion rights is part of the employers' efforts to keep the second class status of women intact by taking away a woman's most fundamental right — control over her own body.

THE MILITANT

PUBLISHED WEEKLY IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

April 10, 1967

The Political Bureau of the Venezuelan Communist Party bitterly denounced Fidel Castro for his March 13 speech about developments in Venezuela. It is a thoroughly devastating indictment of their reformist politics.

The speech represented a development of the revolutionary world view which the Cubans have been unfolding for the past several years, particularly in relation to the defense of the Vietnamese revolution.

The Cubans have insisted on the need to subordinate the differences existing within the socialist bloc to the united defense of the Vietnamese against U.S. imperialism. The Cubans have declared the need for extending the revolutionary struggle as the most effective means of defending the Vietnamese.

THE MILITANT

Official Weekly Organ of the Socialist Workers Party

April 11, 1942

It was only by smashing the trade unions and lowering the living standards of the workers that Hitler was able to put German capitalism in a position to compete with other capitalist countries.

Britain refuses to differentiate between the Nazi ruling machine and the masses oppressed by that machine.

The German people hate Hitlerism, but they also hate the foreign capitalists who will try to make them pay the costs of their war. Overthrowing Hitler will be a tremendous task. One does not lightly undertake such a task unless one feels there is a chance for success.

Extend a hand of solidarity to the German workers and soldiers; promise support to them against the establishment of a new Versailles; offer assistance to them in overthrowing Hitlerism.

Attacks on political events are blow to workers' rights

BY TERRY EVANS

NEW YORK — A small number of students and others protested outside a New York University meeting here March 24 demanding that conservative author Charles Murray not be allowed to speak. This follows the breakup of a meeting for Murray at Middlebury College in Vermont three weeks earlier by a group of students, professors and middle-class radicals. A violent protest in February also prevented self-proclaimed "libertarian, gay, Trump-supporting provocateur" Milo Yiannopoulos from speaking at the University of California in Berkeley.

These actions are a deadly threat to the political space working people need to discuss and organize. At the same time, anarchist "black bloc" and other left groups organized to physically attack marches organized by supporters of President Donald Trump across the country March 25.

Protesters at NYU carried signs that read, "No free speech for racists" and chanted "Charles Murray's got to go!" They shouted "shame!" at economics student Christopher Zhen and others who walked past them to attend the meeting. "I like what Murray says about free markets, but don't agree with what he says about intelligence in his book *The Bell Curve*," Zhen told the *Militant*.

When he was walking by, NYU student Evan Daniels said he previously agreed with the demands of the protesters "but now I think it's wrong to prevent other students from hearing speakers."

The previous evening Murray spoke at a similar restricted meeting of 60 at Columbia University. Prior to the talk a number of Columbia alumni released a public letter saying Murray's views were "Nazi eugenics." Protesting outside the meeting, Bronx Community College professor Alex Wolf told the *New York Times* he hoped "something similar" to the assault on the meeting at Middlebury could be repeated at Columbia.

"The furor," surrounding Murray's book "is not primarily because of what the book says about race. The scandal is its open self-rationalization of the class inequalities and privilege benefiting a growing upper-middle-class layer, and its justification for the anti-working-class bipartisan convergence around economic and social policy," explains Socialist Workers Party National Secretary Jack Barnes in the Pathfinder title *Are They Rich Because They're Smart? Class, Privilege, and Learning Under Capitalism*.

"This book and my campaign answer the denigration of the working class, which is not unique to Murray," Osborne Hart, Socialist Workers Party candidate for New York mayor, explained in discussions with students outside the Columbia meeting. Hart went to both the protests there and at NYU, discussing and debating how best to advance the fight of the working class to organize and take political power. "We've heard the same thing from Hillary Clinton, who called workers "deplorables," and many on the left who say the problem today is that workers — especially those who are Caucasian — are more racist and reactionary than ever today.

"We need to speak out against all attempts to shut down meetings and speakers. Attacks on political rights always end up targeting the working class," Hart said. "We need this space to discuss and debate the road forward in a world where the deepening capitalist economic and political crisis is creating depression-like conditions for our class worldwide. Only the working class can lead a revolution to overthrow dog-eat-dog capitalism and create a society where every human being can reach their potential.

"As the crisis of capitalism deepens, the rulers are beginning to fear the working class and look for ways to restrict political rights," he said. "Today it's anarchists and the middle-class left, not the ultraright, that are at the forefront of shutting down meetings and limiting the space that working people need to carve out a road forward."

Attacks on Trump rallies

Workers World posted an article on their website March 27 hailing the attack that prevented supporters of Trump from holding a march in Philadelphia March 25, saying "multiple forces, notably a large 'black bloc' waving Antifa (Antifascist) and communist flags, mobilized to confront a racist 'Make America Great Again' rally."

Similar efforts to bust up rallies and assault Trump supporters took place in Denver; Omaha, Nebraska; Huntington Beach, California; and other cities.

Reuters/Patrick Fallon

A "black bloc" thug punches a pro-Trump rally participant in the face at Huntington Beach, California, March 25, one of a number of recent attacks on political rights .

The Philadelphia attack was aimed at keeping Trump supporters from being able to "normalize a fascist presence," *Workers World*'s post said.

When the police told the Trump people their march permit was revoked, "black bloc activists took to the street to celebrate."

This was no victory for working people, who need to jealously defend the right to protest.

An anarchist group in Omaha, all dressed in black with masks hiding their faces, tried to take on some 100 supporters of Trump there. The cops pushed them away, including shooting pepper balls at them.

Some 50 others who had come to protest against Trump's policies, but not to attack the rally, were pushed aside.

"It's very upsetting that neither side can exercise freedom of speech peacefully right now," Trump supporter Melynda Ream, 27, told the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Shayla McShannon, 36, another participant in the pro-Trump rally, told the paper she would have liked to have had the chance to talk with the protesters.

Candace Wagner and Lea Sherman contributed to this article.

Washington escalates threats against N. Korea

Continued from front page

in South Korea and another 49,000 in Japan.

Two days later Tillerson went to China. A key part of his discussions with Chinese officials was Washington's push to get Beijing to press harder against Pyongyang.

The war talk is not just hype. The U.S. Army recently sent 100 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles to South Korea that could be used in any attempt to cross the heavily mined Demilitarized Zone into the North.

These moves come on top of increasingly draconian economic sanctions designed to deepen the hardships on working people in the North.

In the midst of the U.S.-South Korean war games, the Pentagon announced it has begun stationing a new generation of attack drones in the South that are capable of staying in the air for 24 hours, equipped with Hellfire missiles.

Washington also began deploying the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, anti-missile system in South Korea — a decision made under the Barack Obama administration — despite strong protests from Beijing, which see it as also aimed at China.

Simultaneously with Operation Foal Eagle, Japanese military forces joined the U.S. and South Korean navies in large-scale drills off the Korean coast.

The Trump administration's shift has bipartisan support. A March 22 editorial in the *Washington Post*, which has published daily attacks on Trump and his supporters, congratulated the White House on its belligerent stance toward Pyongyang.

The Trump administration has "properly focused on what may be the biggest single threat it inherited: the manic pursuit by the regime of Kim Jong Un of nuclear warheads and the capacity to launch them at the continental United States," the editorial said. "The new administration is starting with the most sensible opening steps — a strong effort to enlist China, as well as other nations, in a new campaign of pressure."

Under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, Washington has tried to paint Pyongyang as the aggressor and a rogue nation. George W. Bush included the North in his infamous "axis of evil" speech in 2002, along with Tehran and the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. The next year Washington invaded and occupied Iraq.

Decades of U.S. aggression

Tillerson turned history on its head claiming it is Pyongyang that has broken previous agreements and that Washington wants a "nuclear-free peninsula."

And the U.S. rulers seem oblivious to the added insult of joint maneuvers with Japanese forces during this year's war games. For four decades prior to World War II Japanese imperialist forces occupied Korea, suppressed teaching the Korean language and history in school, banned Korean-language newspapers, and arrested or killed tens of thousands of workers and farmers.

Korean workers and farmers took advantage of the defeat of the Japanese army to advance their fight for independence. Washington blocked the fight, landing troops in the south in September 1945 and, with the agreement of the Stalinist regime in Moscow, dividing the country in two.

By 1948 Washington had crushed the rebellion in the south in blood and imposed the Syngman Rhee dictatorship. North of Korea's 38th parallel, the workers and peasants took power and organized a deep-going agrarian reform, expropriated landlords and capitalists and carried out other social measures.

War broke out on June 25, 1950. The U.S. military drove the northern Korean forces back, virtually to the Chinese border. The new Chinese government, which until then had given little aid to Korea, poured a million volunteer soldiers into the war.

Washington and its "blue hat" United Nations allies utilized carpet bombing with napalm and other weapons of mass destruction that reduced cities to rubble, but was unable to defeat the North. The war ended in a stalemate in 1953 — the first military defeat for U.S. imperialism. Some 3 million Korean civilians, half a million North Korean soldiers, hundreds of thousands of Chinese volunteers, and 100,000 South Korean and U.N. soldiers, including 54,000 from the United States, were dead.

A large majority of Koreans on both sides of the border support reunification.

While the cease-fire remains in place, the U.S. government refuses to sign a peace treaty with North Korea to formally end the war. Is it any wonder that the government of the DPRK and its people are suspicious of Washington's intentions?

But North Korea is not without defenses. Pyongyang has the fourth-largest army in the world, as many as 200,000 special forces, 10,000 artillery pieces and nuclear weapons based underground that could hit Seoul as well as U.S. military bases anywhere in South Korea.

Any preemptive strike by Washington on Pyongyang — as Tillerson says is "on the table" — would not be capable of destroying all of North Korea's nuclear weapons. The chance they could launch a response against Seoul — with over 25 million people in the metropolitan area, half the country's population — is high.

Protests target corrupt rule in Russia, Belarus

BY JIM BRADLEY

Tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in up to 100 cities and towns across Russia March 26 demanding the resignation of Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. The protests — most of which were banned by the government — took place after millions viewed a YouTube documentary exposing Medvedev's lavish property portfolio, worth many times what he can afford on his government salary.

His estate is larger than the entire Vatican, complete with a vineyard.

In Moscow, a large police mobilization arrested 933 people at the protest of over 10,000. Hundreds of young people whistled and chanted as the cops made arrests, shouting "defenders of thieves" and "you can't arrest us all."

"I'm not scared," said activist Oleg Stepanov, the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group in Ukraine reported. "If we don't change anything then there is no future."

Anti-government demonstrations of this magnitude have not occurred since 2011-12, when thousands protested the re-election of Vladimir Putin as president. The geographical spread and striking youthfulness of many of the participants caught Moscow off guard.

"Unlike the largely middle-class protests in 2011, Sunday's rallies included many less well-off citizens, angry over falling living standards after several years of economic stagnation," the *Washington Post* said.

The protests took place in better off cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg as well as Vladivostok, Kaliningrad, Makhachkala in Dagestan, Krasnodar and others large and small.

The actions in Russia took place in the context of a sober outlook for the Russian economy, dependent on oil exports whose price has fallen. There have been numerous strikes across the country by workers who are not getting paid.

The Kremlin denounced the protests as a "provocation," praising the "absolutely top professionalism by the police" and claimed protesters were offered "financial rewards" to participate.

Alexei Navalny, a long-standing opponent of Putin, who called the demonstrations, produced the YouTube video. In retaliation, the cops busted into his Anti-Corruption Foundation office, detaining staff members and seizing computers. Navalny was arrested at the Moscow demonstration and sentenced to 15 days in jail on charges of resisting arrest.

Navalny has announced his intention to run in next year's presidential election and has demanded that Putin allow him to be on the ballot.

The mass arrests in Russia took place the day after 600 protesters were arrested in Minsk, the capital of neighboring Belarus, where thousands demonstrated against the dictatorial regime of Alexander Lukashenko, who has held power for over two decades.

Demonstrators took advantage of the Freedom Day holiday that celebrates the founding of the Belarusian Peoples Republic in 1918 to organize protests in five cities, chanting "Lukashenko, we're tired of you" and "No to dictatorship."

Demonstrations by thousands protesting the regime have been taking place for over a month, spurred by declining living standards workers face as the economy of Belarus has been in recession for over two years. They were sparked by the new so called social parasite tax imposed by the regime on those who work for less than half a year.

Chicago rally hits U.S. colonial rule in Puerto Rico

Militant/Naomi Craine

CHICAGO — More than 100 people rallied downtown here March 22 as part of a "Day of Action: Breaking the Chains of Puerto Rico's Debt." Protests also took place in several other cities in the U.S. and Puerto Rico opposing the deep attacks on the jobs, wages and social conditions of workers being imposed by Washington's Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico. The colonial rulers in Washington and Wall Street demand Puerto Rican workers pay for a $70 billion debt to the capitalist bondholders.

"Our families did not create this crisis, but are paying the price," said Noel Sanchez, who lives and works in Chicago but has relatives on the island. He described the deep cuts to jobs, education, health care and other social needs being inflicted on working people.

"Today marks the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico in 1873," José López, speaking above, executive director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, told protesters. The fight to abolish slavery and for independence had been intertwined in Puerto Rico, he said, as they were in Cuba.

The picket line and rally took place outside the offices of McKinsey & Co., which López said is getting paid some $1 million a month as a "strategic consultant" to the fiscal board. Many participants came from the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and from the Albizu Campos High School affiliated with it. Service Employees International Union Local 73 also joined the action.

— NAOMI CRAINE

New charges filed against Chicago cop who killed youth

BY BETSY FARLEY

CHICAGO — Chicago cop Jason Van Dyke was indicted on 16 new criminal charges March 23, on top of six counts of first-degree murder he already faces, for the 2014 killing of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald. A grand jury brought the new charges of aggravated battery with a firearm for each of the 16 shots he fired.

The court-ordered release of the police dashcam video of the shooting 14 months after it happened prompted sustained protests demanding justice and condemning both the cops and city administration for the cover-up.

The video clearly showed McDonald walking away from police as Van Dyke shot him, including 14 times after the young man was already on the ground. The video contradicts the accounts of Van Dyke and other cops at the scene, who claimed McDonald lunged at them.

The protests led to the firing of then Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy, as Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel moved to contain political damage caused by the shooting and the cover-up.

In January, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a scathing report on the Chicago Police Department, following a yearlong investigation begun after the killing of McDonald. "Among the most egregious uses of deadly force," the report said, "were incidents in which CPD officers shot at suspects who presented no immediate threat."

Last August the *Chicago Tribune* released CPD statistics showing that in 435 police shootings from 2010 to 2015 cops killed 92 people and wounded another 170. Some four out of every five persons shot by cops were African-American males.

"People need to be in that courtroom, all the families, and keep the pressure on until the killer of Laquan McDonald is behind bars," Arewa Karen Winters, a member of Justice for Families, told the *Militant* March 26. Winters is the great aunt of 16-year-old Pierre Loury, who was shot and killed by cops here last April.

"We need to set a precedent and not just for Chicago," she said. "Van Dyke should be convicted and sent to jail like the criminal he is. We don't want to see this happen to other young people."

Welcome Puerto Rico Freedom Fighter Oscar López's return to the struggle!

After nearly 36 years in prison in the United States for his actions in support of independence for Puerto Rico, Oscar López Rivera's sentence was commuted to May 17 by then President Barack Obama as a result of worldwide protests.

On Feb. 9 López returned to San Juan to finish out his sentence under house arrest. The Bureau of Prisons imposed strict conditions of silence. On May 17 prison authorities will remove his GPS ankle tracking device and López will rejoin the fight to free Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial rule.

Initial calendar

Wed., May 17 car caravan across **Puerto Rico**

Thurs., May 18 **Chicago** 4 p.m. la Casita de Don Pedro then march. 5 p.m. event at Humboldt Park Boathouse. Info: Puerto Rican Cultural Center (773) 342-8023

Wed., May 31 **San Francisco** 5 pm reception 7 pm program, place TBA

June 8-11 – **New York City**

Sat. June 17 – Grand Marshal Puerto Rican Day Parade **Chicago**

López is also expected to visit Philadelphia, Orlando, Hartford and other cities.

Idaho silver miners on strike

Continued from page 5

exciting. After that it gets serious and the support is really needed."

"All the wives back the men and our families. We stand beside and help fight," said Tiffany Talley, an office worker and one of a number of miners' family members on the picket line. Her husband Beau Talley works as a truck driver at the mine. "When I'm not at work I am down here and I bring him my son to teach him to help daddy win."

Visiting with workers door to door in Mullan, Martin met Becky Altman and her neighbor Ian Wolford. Altman is a retired union road maintenance worker who has a son on strike at Lucky Friday, a daughter who works as a geologist in the nearby Galena Mine, and a son-in-law who is a gold miner in Alaska. "Miners need to be supported," she said. "We see corporate greed at work — from here to Standing Rock."

Martin said she will use her campaign to win solidarity for the miners wherever she goes.

"I definitely support the miners 100 percent," said Wolford, who works in a fiberglass factory. "I'd say everyone in their right mind should support the miners because we are all affected by what happens here."

Messages and donations can be sent to: USW Local 5114, P.O. Box 427, Mullan, Idaho 83846. More information can be found on the local's Facebook page.

End US embargo of Cuba

Continued from front page

day conference organized to advance the fight to demand Washington end its 55-year-old embargo of Cuba; get out of Guantánamo, Cuban territory that Washington has illegally occupied since 1903; and end all efforts aimed at "regime change" in Cuba. An article on the conference discussion, debate and decisions will appear next week.

The meeting opened with a dinner, to the sounds of drumming by Afro-Boricua Bomba Yo.

The program was co-chaired by Estela Vasquez, an executive vice president of 1199SEIU healthcare workers union, and August Nimtz of the Minnesota Cuba Committee. In opening the program, Vasquez recognized several special guests, including Anayansi Rodríguez, Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations; Miguel Barnet, president of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC); and members of a leadership delegation of the Federation of Cuban Women to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.

In addition to Ramírez, speakers included Rafael Cancel Miranda, a longtime Puerto Rican independence leader imprisoned for more than 25 years by the U.S. colonial rulers; Andrés Gómez, a coordinator of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, a Cuban-American organization based in Miami that has organized support of the Cuban Revolution for four decades; and Juanita Young, whose son Malcolm Ferguson was killed by New York police in 2000.

Ramírez reminded participants that in 1960 when Fidel Castro came to New York to address the U.N. General Assembly on behalf of the newly victorious revolution, downtown hotels insulted and evicted the Cuban delegation. At Malcolm X's initiative, the Cubans were invited to stay at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. Thousands poured into the streets to welcome the Cuban revolutionaries.

Turning to the evening's honored guest, Rafael Cancel Miranda, the ICAP leader underlined revolutionary Cuba's support "for a free and independent Puerto Rican nation."

In his remarks, Cancel Miranda said that although the United States "invaded Puerto Rico and still occupies my country, we are going to fight back until we have ended the colonial slavery of my people.

"And when I say 'my people,' I'm also Cuban. I'm Venezuelan. I'm from Bolivia. I'm from the Caribbean. I'm Puerto Rican from top to bottom, but I'm all of that too." He paid tribute to American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier and Black Panther Herman Bell, with whom he served time in federal prison and who are still behind bars.

"Anybody that stands up and fights is my people," he said. "You're not wasting your time. Fighting for others make all of us more human. Anyone who has dignity supports the Cuban Revolution," the Puerto Rican leader said. "Anyone who *cares*."

Responding to the presentation of a bouquet, Ambassador Rodríguez thanked participants for the "selfless solidarity we have received all these years. What Cuba has achieved," she said, "has been done by the revolution itself, by the Cuban people, a heroic people, a resilient people who've resisted under the most difficult circumstances.

"But we couldn't have done it without the help, the support, the love of all of you," she said. "Particularly here in the United States," whose government "has imposed an unjust, illegal, and unfair blockade against us, which is still there" despite the establishment of diplomatic relations.

U.S. policy has failed for more than five decades, said Andrés Gómez, "because of the determination of the Cuban people to defend their socialist revolution and to continue to fight for a just society."

Describing the work in Miami by the Antonio Maceo Brigade, which marks its 40th anniversary this year, Gómez said it was an honor to be at the conference. "Our job here," he said, "is to fight to end the U.S. policy of permanent aggression against Cuba."

Juanita Young spoke about the trip she and other family members of victims of cop killings and brutality took to Cuba last year. They joined the massive May Day demonstration in Havana, met with a member of the Cuban Five and took part in other activities.

"If I'd been living in Cuba," Young said, "I wouldn't be standing here talking about the death of my son."

Pointing to the human solidarity she and others had experienced, Young concluded, "Cuba, I'll take you any time. You all need to visit Cuba, I'm telling you!"

Cultural performances by Bomba Yo and Cuban Latin jazz pianist Marcello Casagrandi closed the evening.

Jon Flanders

Participants in conference and public meeting in New York March 25-26 in solidarity with Cuba. Special guests included from left, Anayansi Rodríguez, Cuba's ambassador to U.N.; Rafael Cancel Miranda, longtime Puerto Rican independence leader; María de los Angeles Vasquez; and Andrés Gómez, Antonio Maceo Brigade in Miami.

'Fight against deportation is a labor issue'

BY SETH GALINSKY

NEW YORK — "We're going to fight this to the end," Janice Hoseine told the *Militant* March 26. Hoseine's husband Ramesh Palandiandi was seized by Immigration and Customs Enforcement March 9.

The permanent U.S. resident moved here from Guyana in 1992 when he was "just shy of 13 years old," Hoseine said. Like many young workers, "he had some run-ins with the law." In 2007 he was convicted of attempted burglary and served six months in prison.

In 2008 ICE detained Palandiandi for a month and then released him. After his release "we carried on with our life," Hoseine said. Her husband worked and started his own business. "We traveled outside the country, we went to Canada." Hoseine and Palandiandi started Immigrant Outreach, a community organization, and joined the New Sanctuary Coalition.

Then in 2015 ICE detained him again. They learned the ICE case had been "terminated without prejudice" seven years earlier, meaning ICE could refile deportation proceedings at any time. After a year Palandiandi was released but required to wear a GPS ankle bracelet.

On March 9, when Palandiandi reported for his monthly check-in, ICE grabbed him again. They said his deportation order appeal had been exhausted.

"If you're convicted of a felony, a misdemeanor or whatever, you do your time," Hoseine said. "Should someone be punished for the rest of their life just because they're an immigrant?"

Hoseine joined a March 21 protest organized by the Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ against the detention of Juan Vivares, an undocumented worker from Colombia. Vivare's wife Yaharia Burgos is a member of 32BJ.

"What is happening to immigrants is a labor issue," Local 32BJ President Hector Figueroa told the press. "All of labor needs to stand with familes like Yaharia and Juan's."

"I told Yaharia to stay strong," Hoseine said.

André Daughtry

Protest opposing deportations of immigrants March 19 in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York. Janice Hoseine, front left, whose husband Ramesh Palandiandi, was grabbed by ICE March 9, joined demonstration. "We're going to fight this to the end," she said.

Stop the deportations and raids!
AMNESTY NOW!
Join May 1 protests!

In the face of ongoing deportations of undocumented workers, immigration "audits" that lead to mass firings, and demagogic anti-immigrant rhetoric from the White House and Congress, there are demonstrations, marches, work stoppages and school boycotts being organized across the country. The *Militant* supports the call by the Socialist Workers Party for amnesty to unite the working class.

Let the *Militant* know about actions being planned in your area. If there are none, you can take the lead in organizing one!

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Milwaukee For more info (414) 643-1620
New York City Location to be announced

Send information on actions in your area to:

themilitant@mac.com

Workers, youth from 23 countries to join Cuba Brigade

BY TERRY EVANS

Participants from the United States in the 12th May Day International Brigade to Havana, April 24-May 8, "will join with brigadistas from at least 22 other countries to do voluntary work in the fields and meet and discuss with Cuban workers, farmers and youth," Sandra Ramírez, North America director of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), told the *Militant* March 25, during a visit to New York.

The brigade will offer solidarity with the Cuban people's struggle to end the decadeslong U.S. embargo. It is also an opportunity to learn directly about Cuba's socialist revolution. Similar brigades from the United Kingdom and Canada will travel to Cuba around the same time.

"The highlight will be joining the Cuban people to celebrate May Day in Havana at a march and rally in the Plaza of the Revolution," Ramírez said. ICAP is hosting the brigade.

This year's May Day march comes just months after millions of working people across the island came into the streets to salute the life of Fidel Castro, the revolution's central leader, following his death last November. Millions also signed a pledge to uphold Cuba's revolutionary course, expressed by Castro in a May Day speech in 2000. "This year's brigade will honor the legacy of Castro and revolutionary leader Che Guevara," Ramírez said.

"This is the first time there has been a U.S. contingent on the brigade and 50 have already signed up to go," she noted. "Following May Day, participants will join others at an International Meeting in Solidarity with Cuba in Havana, to discuss and debate how to deepen solidarity with the Cuban Revolution," Ramírez said.

After the conference, most of the U.S. contingent will visit health centers, schools and historic sites and meet with members of mass organizations in the provinces of Villa Clara and Cienfuegos.

Some will attend the Fifth Seminar for Peace and for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases, in Guantánamo May 4-6. "They will visit the border and see the affect of the illegal U.S. Navy base on Cuban sovereignty," said Ramírez.

Occupied against the will of the Cuban people since 1903, the Guantánamo base has been used as a military toehold against the revolution since 1959. Washington continues to use the base to detain prisoners captured during U.S. wars, indefinitely and without charge.

Participants in the U.S. contingent are using fundraising efforts to help cover expenses and increase knowledge of the Cuban Revolution at the same time. "All Guantánamo is Ours," a film about Cuba's struggle to end the U.S. Navy's occupation of Guantánamo Bay, is being screened in Los Angeles April 1.

Cuban News Agency/Oscar Alfonso

Last year's May Day International Solidarity Brigade visited Camilo Cienfuegos museum in Yaguajay, Cuba. This year's brigade will do voluntary work in agriculture; meet Cuban workers, farmers and youth; join in May Day march; take part in international solidarity conference.

There are now 34 people registered to go on the Che Guevara Volunteer Work Brigade organized by the Canadian Network on Cuba. It will visit Holguín, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo April 28–May 12. Brigade member Angela Milivojevic, 18, said she was interested in going to Guantánamo "to see the effects of U.S. imperialism there."

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign from the U.K. is organizing a Young Trade Unionists May Day Brigade from April 27 to May 9. In addition to participating in the Havana May Day march it will meet Cuban trade unionists, visit hospitals, schools and workplaces.

Osborne Hart, the Socialist Workers Party candidate for New York mayor, is one of those on the U.S. contingent. "The revolution workers and farmers made in Cuba is an example we can emulate. They faced a dictatorship that was backed by the unparalleled might of U.S. imperialism and they fought and won," he said. "When I return I'll continue helping to build actions demanding an end to the embargo and the immediate U.S withdrawal from Guantánamo."

The Chicago Cuba Coalition is organizing arrangements for U.S. brigade participants. For more information, contact the coalition at (312) 952-2618 or email: ICanGoToCuba@gmail.com.

For information about the brigade from Canada contact chevolbrigade@gmail.com or call (647) 787-5207.

Joe Young in Calgary contributed to this article.

Capitalism deepens wildfire disaster for ranchers

BY PATRICIA MARSHALL

Extensive wildfires began sweeping through 2 million acres of Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas March 6, burning cattle and other livestock, buildings, grasslands and the fencing on it. Seven people died as a result, three of them young ranchers in Texas trying to rescue their cattle. Thousands of people had to evacuate their homes.

Thousands of tons of donated hay were already arriving in Clark County, Kansas, while the last fires were still being put out. Ranchers, farmers, truckers, students and others in the region and across the country are continuing to get solidarity and supplies to affected ranchers.

Dry conditions, low humidity and strong winds are blamed for the fires spreading at up to 70 miles per hour. New fires continue to break out, scorching 2,500 acres in Seward County, Kansas, March 23. Five fires were reported in Texas March 27.

The social relations of the dog-eat-dog capitalist system working people face have turned the "natural" disaster of the fires into a social catastrophe for ranchers and others who live in this region. This is especially the case in Kansas where 85 percent of rural Clark County went up in flames.

March is always a month when wildfires are most likely, but no steps were taken to minimize the threat when above-average rainfall encouraged the growth of forage grasses across the cattle ranches. This grass can dry out in one hour, ideal fuel for wildfires to spread.

Fields with growing crops can stop or retard the spread of these fires. One of the reasons the town of Ashland in Clark County was not burned down was that the head of the fire hit green fields that acted as a firebreak. But the Conservation Reserve Program, administered by the Farm Service Agency, pays farmers to take land out of crop production to encourage the development of grasslands.

The continuing spread of red cedar trees from 55 million trees to 85 million between 2005 and 2015 meant additional fuel for fires. There is no government plan for prescribed burns to contain their growth.

In spite of the known threat of wildfires, the Kansas Forest Service only has four people working fulltime on firefighting and fire prevention.

Last March a large wildfire spread from Oklahoma into neighboring Comanche and Barber counties in Kansas. Firefighters from the two states could not coordinate their efforts because Kansas didn't have the legislation in place to authorize it. This remains the case a year later.

In face of the social disaster, working class solidarity is evident. A convoy of some 30 trucks left Ohio on March 24 carrying hay, feed and 25 volunteers from across the state planning to work with ranchers in southwest Kansas. Some 200 volunteers, including students on spring break, are working around Ashland in Clark County, one of the state's hardest hit areas.

It wasn't until March 21, more than two weeks after the fires broke out, that the Department of Agriculture announced a paltry $6 million in disaster funding was available to farmers and ranchers across the three states. Estimates put the cost of lost cattle, land recovery and replacing and repairing fences in the northern Texas Panhandle alone at $12.4 million.

Maximum allowances for a rancher's cattle losses are capped at $125,000 and funds to replace fencing that costs some $10,000 a mile is capped at $200,000. Jennie Giles-Betschart, a Kansas rancher, told Fox News that the fire destroyed miles of fence on her family's ranch in Clark County. Replacing it would take $800,000 out of their pockets.

And government funds only come after fences are replaced and paid for, with stringent and complicated conditions. Separate forms, some several pages long, have to be completed for each claim.

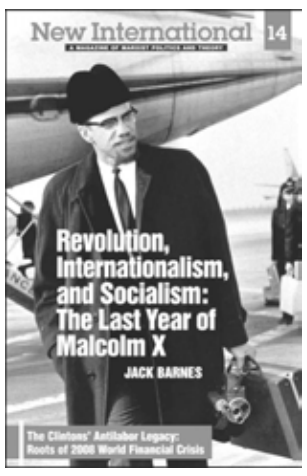
All this happens at a time when ranchers are seeing prices for their cattle plummet. There was a combined 40 percent drop in ranch and farm income in 2015. The loss of cattle in the fires and the huge cost of replacing fencing threaten to force ranchers out of business.

Kansas Department of Agriculture figures show over 5,000 less ranches and farms there since 2007.

Ranchers also face declining land values. In 2016, for the first time in 26 years, South Dakota ranch and farmland values fell.

Many ranchers who voted for Donald Trump in last year's presidential election, hoping for change, have noted the absence of any comment on the wildfires by the president. At the same time, budget proposals he is making include slashing the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development programs by 21 percent.

This cut includes cutting staff in the Service Center offices — the very places ranchers are directed to submit claims after the wildfires.



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‘US Civil War was greatest revolution of 19th century’

Below is an excerpt from Democracy and Revolution: From Ancient Greece to Modern Capitalism *by George Novack. It is one of Pathfinder’s Books of the Month for April. Novack joined the communist movement in 1933, and remained a member and leader of the Socialist Workers Party until his death in 1992. The piece is from the section “The Rise and Decline of Bourgeois Democracy.” Copyright © 1971 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.*

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY GEORGE NOVACK

The mass of participants in the revolutionary events who shouldered these historical tasks and carried them through were not endowed with exceptional individual abilities. They were indeed less literate, well-informed and historical-minded than the average citizen of today. But peoples who get caught up in and swept along by a mighty and irresistible tide of social change are capable of hitherto unimaginable accomplishments.

The creative capacities of the insurgent masses were shown in the successive revolutionary combats which toppled the old regimes in the West and ushered in the new bourgeois order. During the formative stages of capitalism, six great upheavals marked the decisive steps in the forward march of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

The first was the Dutch revolution of the late sixteenth century by which the Netherlands won its independence and set up its republic. The second was the English revolutions of the seventeenth century, which secured the supremacy of the British bourgeoisie and their parliament. The third was the revolt of the American colonists, which created the United States. The fourth was the French Revolution, which was decisive in demolishing the old order in Western Europe. The fifth was the less successful Revolutions of 1848 on that continent. The American Civil War was the concluding act in this series of struggles by which the world bourgeoisie attained sovereignty and the democratic revolution fulfilled its mission. …

Members of the South Carolina legislature, 1868, during Radical Reconstruction after Civil War. “Ex-slaves helped set up and participated in highly progressive state governments which displaced the despotism of the planters,” wrote Novack. It “cut down illiteracy” and much more.

The American Civil War, which erupted thirteen years after 1848, has a twofold importance in the annals of the bourgeois revolution. It was the second and closing act of the democratic revolution in the United States. And it was the greatest revolution of the nineteenth century, the last thoroughgoing mass struggle carried through by the radical bourgeoisie in the Western world.

The second American revolution had both national and international roots. It was necessitated by the incompleteness of the first and by the vast economic and social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of commercial agriculture on a domestic and world scale.

The first American revolution had liberated the thirteen colonies from British rule, created the federal union and set up a democratic republic. But it had failed to deliver state power firmly into the hands of the northern bourgeoisie or to extirpate slavery. The economic and political ascendancy of the cotton nobility during the first half of the nineteenth century held back the reconstruction of American society along purely capitalist lines and threatened to make the capitalist class along with the rest of the nation subordinate to the slave power. The Civil War was the showdown between these two chief contenders for supremacy in North America.

The victory of the Union shattered the last of the precapitalist social formations and ruling classes that blocked the expansion and challenged the hegemony of the native American capitalists. The defeat of the southern slaveholding oligarchy prevented the United States from becoming Balkanized and preserved the unity of the nation. The illegalization of chattel slavery formally liberated the black men from bondage and warded off the dangers to the democratic rights of the people posed by the aggressions of the ultrareactionary slave power….

For a few years during the postwar Reconstruction of the South, the ex-slaves helped set up and participated in highly progressive state governments which replaced the despotism of the planters with an extension of the power of the people. The radical Reconstruction regimes improved educational facilities, equalized taxes, cut down illiteracy, abolished imprisonment for debt, did away with property qualifications for voting and holding office and instituted other reforms in city, county and state government. For the first time, black men were elected to state legislatures and Congress.

These governments rested on a coalition of freedmen and their allies among the small farmers and poor whites. But the decisive power was held by the federal government and its armed forces, which occupied the South and supervised its affairs.

The radical Republicans in Washington pursued a contradictory agrarian policy. In the unorganized western territories, they gave free homesteads to white settlers and immense tracts of land to railroad companies, real-estate speculators, lumber and mining interests. Their land policy in the South was very different. There they feared to carry through an agrarian revolution which would have involved the expropriation of the land owned by the secessionist planters and distribution of it among the landless laborers.

Although they nullified three billion dollars worth of property in slaves, the triumphant capitalists were unwilling to confiscate landed property for the benefit of the freedmen. To the contrary, in some places the blacks were deprived of the lands they had taken over and were cultivating on their own account. …

The experience of Reconstruction and its aftermath also exemplified the incapacity of the capitalist class, even in its most radical days, to realize bourgeois democracy to the full or extend full and enduring equality to national minorities. So long as the northern bourgeoisie needed the black masses as a pawn in their combat against the cotton nobility, they granted a certain increment of freedom to them. But once they had cinched total mastery in the nation and over the South, the managers of the Republican Party turned against the southern masses. To keep the presidency in 1876, they made a deal with the new bourgeoisie and planters of the South at the expense of the plebeians and delivered the freedmen back into peonage.

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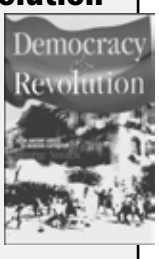

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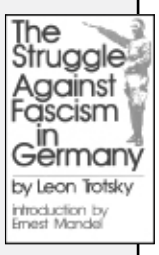

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—SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STATEMENT—

Join fight for universal health care!

Continued from front page

get jobs. Wages are stagnating or being pushed down. Workers in uniform are being sent to fight in nonstop wars to defend the interests of the propertied rulers. Infrastructure is crumbling. The cost of health insurance is going up.

For workers and farmers, access to health care is literally a life and death question. We need to join together to fight for government-funded, cradle-to-grave medical care as a social right for *all*. Our unions should be at the forefront of this fight .

The mixed bag of the Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare, is health *insurance* not health care — designed first and foremost to boost the profits of the insurance and drug monopolies. While millions were able to get some inadequate and rationed coverage, which is better than nothing, it has meant skyrocketing premiums, deductibles and co-pays for shrinking care.

Trumpcare would have made this profit-driven system even worse, adding another 24 million without health care by 2026. Like Obamacare, its sponsors' chief concern is the profits of the health "industry."

The Trump administration plan, which is off the table for the moment, includes a fundamental assault on Medicaid, a historic gain of the mass Black rights fight that overturned Jim Crow segregation and won broader social rights. The rulers' efforts to deliver blows to Medicaid would affect tens of millions of workers, children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and their family and friends. It would open the door to attacks on other entitlements won by past working-class struggles — from Medicare to Social Security.

Working people place no price on life and limb. Health shouldn't be based on profitability. That's why many working people are attracted to the demand for a "single-payer" system, sometimes called "Medicare for all."

The working class, led by the union movement, should fight for universal, lifetime health care for all, whatever name it's given. Through our labor, the working class produces all the wealth, more than enough to provide health care and other social needs for all.

Revolutionary Cuba — where health care is a right, not a privilege — shows what working people can accomplish when we wrest power from the capitalist rulers and begin to build a society based on human solidarity. Fighting for universal health care today will help open that road to the socialist future here.

200 protest cop killings, brutality in Bakersfield

BY LAURA GARZA

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. — Some two hundred people joined the Third Annual Walk for Justice here March 19 to protest police killings and brutality by Bakersfield Police Department and Kern County Sheriff's Department officers. They marched to several sites where people were killed by police, ending in a park where families had set up posters and banners in honor of loved ones lost.

"I will never accept or forget the beat down and cowardly murder of my son," said Merri Silva speaking at the spot her son David was beaten on May 7, 2013, by nine Bakersfield and Kern County cops. He was bitten by police dogs, hogtied and eventually died as a result.

"At the beginning there were just a few of us, look at us now," said Chris Silva, David's brother, gesturing to the crowd. He noted the widespread publicity the protests and killings had received and that family members were involved in suits against the cops. "Our loved ones are getting killed and they're giving us money to shut up. We're not going to shut up."

A growing list of names of those killed by cops here since 1994 was printed on the backs of T-shirts of the marchers.

The last name was Francisco Serna, a 73-year-old grandfather shot by Bakersfield cops outside his home last December. Serna had early stages of dementia and when he didn't comply immediately when cops shouted orders at him, one opened fire. As Serna lay dying, the cops refused to allow his wife or daughter to come to his side. They threatened other family members who arrived, saying they would be arrested or tasered if they tried to reach him.

"They cuffed him and let dogs on him, they didn't need to torture him," Laura Serna, who was there when her father was shot, told Dennis Richter, recently announced Socialist Workers Party candidate for congress in the 34th CD in Los Angeles.

"The police do this all over because they are not serving and protecting us, instead they protect the system of wealthy capitalists, that's who they serve and they look at all of us as potential criminals," Richter said. "They can't be reformed."

"It will take revolutionary changes, where working people fight to take power out of the hands of the ruling wealthy, to have a different justice system built in our interests," he said.

The march also stopped where James De La Rosa was shot in November 2014 and at the Walgreens where Ronnie Ledesma was beaten by cops and later died.

The impact of the protests forced the California state attorney general to open an investigation into the Bakersfield and Kern County cops in December, shortly after the killing of Francisco Serna.

The county District Attorney decided to drop charges against Xavier Hines and Timothy Grismore, Black students at Bakersfield College students, who were stopped by the cops as they went for pizza after studying one night. One was beaten and both were arrested, framed up on charges of jaywalking and resisting arrest. However, the NAACP released a video interview with them about how they were treated and the case blew up.

— LETTERS —

Free speech is a necessity

The *Militant*'s March 27 article on the breakup of the March 2 appearance at Middlebury College by conservative author Charles Murray (*The Bell Curve*) struck exactly the right note on this unfortunate, but all too common, exercise of campus censorship today. I congratulate Alyson Kennedy for her timely and straightforward intervention in the discussion triggered by this event.

She is absolutely right that we must "confront" and "debate" reactionary ideas that threaten the interests of the working class, not suppress and legitimize them by handing their proponents the mantle of defenders of free speech. Unfortunately, this suppressive "PC" culture, promoted by budding meritocrats in academia today, is all too common.

Defending freedom of speech and discussion is a necessity for all working people seeking to confront the deepening crisis of capitalism, and I welcome the Socialist Workers Party taking it on!

Peter Anestos
New York, New York
Middlebury College Class of 1995

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A prisoner
California

US war in Syria, Iraq

Continued from front page

people died March 20 when coalition bombs struck a school sheltering homeless Syrians near Raqqa. It was a "new massacre committed by the U.S.-led coalition," said the United Kingdom-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

According to Airwars, an organization that monitors claims of civilian casualties, over 1,000 civilians were killed in U.S.-led airstrikes in the two countries over the past month.

"We used to be afraid of the Syrian regime strikes or the Russian strikes, but not the Americans," a Raqqa resident who lost 11 family members told the *New York Times*. "Now we fear the US coalition more than anything else — their weapons are so advanced. For us, they are the most deadly of all."

The Pentagon's rules of engagement governing airstrikes allow for the "proportional" possibility of some civilian casualties, depending on the grade of target, a standard set by the Barack Obama administration. The Donald Trump administration is discussing relaxing these rules further.

The civil war in Syria began after the regime of Bashar al-Assad unleashed brutal repression against a wave of mass protests in 2011 for political rights and the end of his dictatorial rule, killing and imprisoning tens of thousands. Since then, sieges and carpet bombing by his regime — and now increasingly bombings from Washington and Moscow, as well as ground assaults by Tehran, its allied Shiite militias and Ankara — have killed over 400,000 people and driven more than 10 million from their homes.

U.S. coalition set to assault Raqqa

The new escalation in the Washington-led military campaign in Syria began March 21 when coalition helicopters brought Kurdish-led Syrian Defense Force fighters and U.S. special forces behind Islamic State lines near the town of Tabqa, 25 miles west of Raqqa on the Euphrates River.

"It takes a special breed of warrior to pull off an airborne or air assault behind enemy lines," U.S. Col. Joe Scrocca boasted afterwards, praising his Kurdish-led partners. "There is nothing easy about this — it takes audacity and courage. And the SDF has that in spades."

Washington's alliance with the SDF is bitterly opposed by the regime of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who, along with Washington and all the other capitalist powers with large Kurdish populations — Iran, Iraq and Syria — have historically stood against the decadeslong struggle of the oppressed Kurdish people for a homeland and national sovereignty. Ankara has proposed that Turkish-led troops team up with Washington to take Raqqa instead.

The YPG currently controls 20,000 square miles of Syrian territory with a population of 2 million Kurds on the Syrian-Turkish border. Ankara charges the YPG is allied with the "terrorist" Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, against whom they have waged a bloody war for over three decades.

Last year Ankara invaded Syria to prevent the YPG from linking up with Kurds west of the Euphrates River, fearing an autonomous Kurdish region along its entire Syrian border will strengthen the struggle for autonomy of the 15 million Kurds inside Turkey.

Since their offensive began, the U.S.-backed forces have taken the air base and the southern end of the Tabqa dam. In the course of the bombing and fighting, the dam was damaged. The water level is rising and water and electricity from it to Raqqa are both shut down.

Islamic State forces in the city began broadcasting warnings March 26 that U.S. airstrikes were going to cause the dam to collapse and lead to widespread flooding. In the ensuing panic, many of the IS leaders and combatants are believed to have fled.

Workers still inside the city face dire conditions. In addition to the lack of water and electricity, the hospitals are shuttered and prices for limited available food have spiked.